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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARAMARIBO 000127

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

WHA/FO FOR CHARLES SHAPIRO, WHA/CAR FOR LAURA LUFTIG AND  
MATTHEW BUFFINGTON, INR FOR BOB CARHART

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/12/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NS](#)

SUBJECT: BOUTERSE COMEBACK SPINS ITS WHEELS AS TRIAL  
APPROACHES

Classified By: P/E Officer Andy Utschig for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The long-delayed murder trial of former military strongman Desi Bouterse and other suspects is now expected to start in March or April of 2007. However, Bouterse is among 23 suspects and it appears they will be tried in turn, meaning it could be months or even years before Bouterse himself is asked to take the stand. Meanwhile, Bouterse has been seeking press attention, in part by blaming some past troubles on the CIA (even while seeking a better relation with the U.S. through intermediaries), and by alternately defiant and conciliatory statements about the trial. END SUMMARY

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A Long and Winding Road  
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¶2. (U) The wheels of justice continue to turn slowly, but steadily towards the trial of Desi Bouterse and 22 others accused of murdering 15 vocal opponents in December 1982. Minister of Justice and Police Chandrikapersad Santokhi continues to insist that the military-tribunal murder trial will take place, and the government of Suriname has prepared a venue with enhanced security. The starting date remains unclear, however. The newly appointed President of the Court of Justice said he expects a ruling on the last of the suspects, appeals and motions, and that after that the military tribunal can begin. He said, however, "I understand that the military tribunal will be busy with the handling of this matter for a long time." Moreover, the judge who is expected to preside has had numerous health problems, and Suriname's overworked judiciary does not have a ready replacement. Finally, Bouterse himself publicly questioned why the government has spent so much money on the trial facilities, as he doesn't know who will ever go on trial there\* certainly not himself. Bouterse reacted to the government's intention to shut down nearby roads during the trial by saying the government should be careful that he doesn't shut the government down.

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Getting Good Press Isn't Easy...  
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¶3. (U) Meanwhile, Bouterse's National Democratic Party (NDP) continues to try to prepare the ground for any fall of the governing coalition, and build up its youth wing in the process. To that end, on February 25, 2007 (the 27th anniversary of the coup with which it took power), the NDP held a youth information session about what the party calls the "revolution." Bouterse spoke at length in answer to open-mike questions by a full house. Few of the questions

were critical, and many in the audience appeared to have made their choice for NDP long before. The event was not a full-fledged public relations success; two newspapers which normally line up against the government responded with editorials calling for Bouterse,s trial to go forward in order to bring clarity, and one of them referred to the murders as a &bloodbath.8 Bouterse promised and delivered a follow-up session two weeks later on March 11; this event was less well attended, the questions were more critical of Bouterse, and the press reported that the event was a disappointment. Bouterse has always admitted &political responsibility8 for the murders, and he did so again. This time, however, he for the first time added an apology to the families of the victims. Public reaction was mixed, and as usual with Bouterse, most of those who did comment asked that their names be withheld, likely for fear of retribution. Bouterse,s reputation for violence still casts a long shadow here.

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...but it helps if you talk about the CIA...  
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14. (U) Throughout this bout of activity, Bouterse made frequent references to the CIA. Accusations that the CIA tried to overthrow the Bouterse military regime have been a common theme in the past for Bouterse,s party, and materials discussing various theories can be found on the internet. Portions of the Surinamese press picked up on the accusations uncritically, referring for example to the &CIA coup8 as if it were an accepted part of Surinamese history. Meanwhile, Bouterse and his party kept up a steady stream of negativity about the U.S. and the Netherlands, saying that they don,t need any foreign help, and that they will fight until the

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bitter end to remove all foreign influence from Suriname.

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...even if you,d rather be friends  
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15. (C) Ironically, all of this followed shortly after a February 7 meeting in which prominent NDP politicians Jenny Simons, Rabin Parmessar, and Gerard Brunings asked PolOff if Bouterse could have a meeting with the Embassy &at a certain level.8 They reacted strongly when PolOff suggested that the NDP,s policy doesn,t seem to leave room for good relations with the United States. On the contrary, they said, it is the United States which is not leaving room for a relationship. NDP leaders are still upset that the United States government said publicly during Suriname,s 2005 elections that if Bouterse is elected, the U.S. will not be able to work with him. They requested a retraction.

16. (C) COMMENT: Bouterse is feeling the heat. Even if it does take months before Bouterse is called to take the stand, his reputation and career will be on trial from the beginning. His attempts to generate a wave of public dissent are not succeeding, and his attempts to generate positive publicity remain full of bravado but lack focus and effect. Lashing out at everyone from the government to the Dutch to the United States, Bouterse is beginning to look desperate. While the meeting between Simons, Parmessar, Brunings, and PolOff on its face was about rehabilitating Bouterse, in reality these savvy politicians may have been sounding out the shape of a Bouterse-less future. END COMMENT  
SCHREIBER HUGHES